

October 15, 2001

Contact: John R. Kemp

COMMISSIONER OF HIGHER EDUCATION OPENS LOUISIANA CONFERENCE ON COLLEGE ALCOHOL AND BINGE DRINKING – FIRST IN THE NATION

BATON ROUGE -- Calling alcohol abuse on college campuses “an abuse that limits futures and lives,” Commissioner of Higher Education E. Joseph Savoie called on Louisiana’s colleges to exceed their obligations and public expectations in fighting this problem, during his opening speech at a special regional conference on alcohol abuse and binge drinking.

Representatives from Louisiana colleges and universities, local communities and a national consumer-alcohol organization met here this morning to form a statewide coalition to help prevent binge-drinking on college campuses and other alcohol-related abuses.

The Harvard School of Public Health reports that frequent binge-drinking is up 14 percent from 1993 to 1999. The report defined frequent binge-drinkers as males who consumed five drinks and females who consumed four drinks in a row at least three times in the two weeks prior to the Harvard study.

Savoie cited a number of alarming statistics to drive home the point that the entire education community must be concerned about alcohol abuse. “It is estimated that 41 percent of all academic problems stem from alcohol abuse,” he said. “The ripple effect of this abuse captures victims far beyond academic impairments. Alcohol abuse kills 6.5 times more young people than all other drugs combined. Alcohol abuse contributes to 70 percent of violent behavior on campus.” He said 90 percent of all campus rapes occur when alcohol has been used by either the assailant or the victim.

“These statistics are not just numbers,” he said, “they are real human beings, our sons and our daughters. And each of these numbers represents loss potential in our families, in our communities and our state. And there is a huge financial burden for us as well. Higher dropout rates cause colleges to lose more than \$261 million in tuition annually.”

The three-day conference held at LSU in Baton Rouge, the first regional statewide conference of its type in the nation, was sponsored by LSU-Eunice through grants from the Washington, D.C.-based Distilled Spirits Council of the United States and the Goldring Family Foundation of New Orleans. Its purpose is to encourage college campuses to work with local community leaders, law enforcement officials, and alcoholic-beverage retailers and wholesalers to develop specific plans to reduce alcohol abuse among college students.

The commissioner said no campus is immune from alcohol abuse and no individual program or person can solve the problem. However, Savoie stated that this conference, which focuses on campus and community action, is a major step in the right direction. “It takes a collective, sustained approach to address what has been called the problem that enrolls and never graduates,” Savoie said.

Research shows that while two out of three college presidents consider binge drinking a problem only 40 percent of colleges have cooperative arrangements with their surrounding communities to address under-age or excessive drinking.

According to a report published by the Higher Education Center for Alcohol and Other Drug Prevention, college and university officials cannot “succeed in reducing the scope of this problem if they fail to work in partnership with local and state government officials, law enforcement, community prevention advocates and the owners of local taverns and restaurants that sell alcohol.”

Also addressing the conference was Deno Curris, president of the American Association of State Colleges and Universities, which represents over 400 colleges and universities nationwide including Louisiana. “We try to encourage responsible behavior,” he said. “We want students to be safe and to become mature, responsible people. When students don’t abuse alcohol, life on campus is so much more pleasurable for everyone.”

Savoie said while the majority of students do not abuse alcohol, the public and parents are concerned about the impact of those who do. “We must do all we can,” he said, “to exceed their expectations and our obligations to our students.”

-30-